



After the Medevac

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WHEN SSG William Johnston, a technician with the 763rd Explosive Ordnance Detachment from Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., had several of his fingers blown off in Afghanistan, he was stabilized and quickly medevaced to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. There he underwent skin-graft surgery and eventually received a prosthetic hand.

As bad as the situation was, it could certainly have been worse, said Johnston. He could have lost his entire arm — or been killed. He doesn't dwell on what could have happened, he said. He's only looking ahead. With his upbeat attitude comes high praise for a recently introduced program at LRMC that, he said, has supported him every step of the way.

This is DWMMC

The Deployed Warrior Medical Management Center, DWMMC, in operation since March 2002, is specifically geared toward helping soldiers deployed in support of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom who require medical care, whether they've been injured in combat or need routine attention.

Between March 22 and April 3, 226 service members involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom arrived at LRMC, said its commander, COL David Rubenstein.

"Ninety-six of those patients had suffered battle injuries," he said.

Among the patients evacuated to LRMC was PFC Jessica Lynch of the 507th Maintenance Company, who was rescued by special operations forces after being taken prisoner by Iraqi troops.

The DWMMC is essentially a group of people who track patients' medical evacuations, monitor departures from "downrange" and their arrivals, record medical information

into a computerized system before patients arrive, meet them when the medevac helicopter lands at LRMC, and ensure that everything's set up to accommodate the patients — from billeting to chow and medical appointments.

"When I got here, I had nothing," said Johnston. "The special forces medic who stabilized me in Kandahar stripped off my bloody trousers. My ID card was in my pants pocket with everything else in my wallet. It's good someone had the forethought to bring me a change of clothes from the DWMMC lending closet so I didn't have to walk across the parking lot naked."

DWMMC's Origins

"After U.S. forces went into Afghanistan, we knew we'd have more patients coming into the hospital," said Jeff Frazier, the deputy chief of patient administration. "We needed to have a way to track them and provide them whatever they needed."

"We had a basic program in place, called the Referral Support Center," said Rubenstein. "It consisted of a few soldiers, but no doctors or nurses."

The DWMMC has one physician, two nurses as case managers, and eight support personnel, mostly medics. The group is augmented by the hospital chaplain's office and American Red Cross personnel, who help set up patient appointments, said patient administration NCOIC SGT Wayne Broom.

"Our mission is to ensure that a deployed patient coming from Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan, as examples, comes into our system and is immediately cared for, so he or she can return to the United States as quickly as possible," said Broom.

Since October 2001 — when there was only a two-person air-evacuation center operating at Landstuhl to respond directly on

The DWMMC helps soldiers deployed in support of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom who require medical care.

The DWMMC's SPC Anthony Sloan works with German emergency medical personnel to load a simulated casualty aboard a UH-60 helicopter during a training exercise. (LRMC photo)



behalf of Operation Enduring Freedom personnel — 900 patients have arrived from Afghanistan. They included joint-service members, Defense Department civilians and contractors injured by hostile fire, stabbings, helicopter crashes and mine blasts.

The center also received amputees and patients suffering with everything from appendicitis and kidney stones to toothaches, Broom said.

Variety of Patients and Injuries

Rubenstein said 11 percent of the 900 patients were combat casualties. The remainder suffered non-battle injuries and diseases.

Service members from Australia, Canada, Great Britain and Norway have been brought to the DWMMC, Rubenstein said, as have CIA agents and a Canadian reporter.

On a recent day, COL Larry Rogers, a Reservist with the 360th Civil Affairs Battalion from Fort Jackson, S.C., who was deployed to Bosnia, arrived at LRMC after spending some time in the emergency room at the military hospital in Bosnia

Wounded EOD technician SSG William Johnston gets an update on his condition from his physician at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

with severe chest pains. At LRMC he learned that one of his coronary arteries is 70 percent blocked and he'll be sent back to the United States for further treatment.

SPC Alexis Wilson, a member of the 125th Signal Battalion from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and deployed to the Middle East, came for tests and observation to find out why his blood-sugar level has soared and his vision is blurred.

Army Reservist CW2 Drew Webb from the St. Louis, Mo.-based 329th Quartermaster Battalion, who was deployed to Camp Stronghold, Uzbekistan, flew in for routine oral surgery.

SPC David Knuutila, a Reservist with the 339th Combat Support Hospital in Bagram, Afghanistan, was flown in to get a herniated disk repaired. SPC Kristina Kennedy, of the same unit, came for a consultation with doctors about a cancerous mass they'd found in her body. And Chap-

lain (CPT) Archie Simmons of the 87th Combat Support Bn., at Fort Stewart, Ga., who was serving in Africa, arrived at DWMMC after spending time in the intensive care unit of a French-run hospital in Africa, also with chest pains.

"The most memorable event for me as part of the DWMMC staff came after Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan, when 10th Mountain Division soldiers who had suffered combat-related injuries arrived at the DWMMC," said Broom. "One of them told me about their helicopter being shot down. And, seeing him clinging to another soldier in order to stand upright, I could only imagine what they'd been through. It made me realize for the first time that there was really a war going on over there."

When U.S. special forces soldiers were injured in the very first bomb attack in Afghanistan, they were also flown to LRMC, said DWMMC's SPC Thomas Livingston. Collectively, they'd suffered burns, shrapnel injuries and lost limbs.

Of the patients DWMMC has received, some 600 have been Army personnel, said Livingston. They stay at the hospital anywhere from 24 hours to three weeks. The average stay is one week.

An Air Force computerized tracking system accounts for patients who are en route to LRMC and provides information to the hospital well in advance of the patient's arrival, including the care he or she requires and, in the case of combat injuries, whether or not psychological counseling or other specific care will be needed, Broom said.

"During Desert Storm, LRMC personnel had an idea of how many patients would be medevaced in, but they didn't have specific information about individuals' medical conditions to speed up their care upon arrival," said Livingston. "As many as 200 patients arrived per day during that time. And there was a lot of scram-

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bling to get them where they needed to go.”

Two or three people from the DWMMC now meet each medevac helicopter flight coming in through the program. “Sometimes we get three birds in one night. Sometimes we go for three days without even one bird coming in,” Livingston said. “On a busy day, we’ve had as many as 25 patients arrive at once.”

“DWMMC personnel are the first medical responders the arriving patients see upon arrival at LRMC,” said Livingston. “If the doctor isn’t waiting at the landing pad when the patient comes off the helicopter, we, the medics, take vital statistics and patient history, before returning to our admin role.”

DWMMC representatives log the patient data into their computer system and transport outpatients to billeting. Additionally, members of the DWMMC provide clothing for patients who need it and accompany them to the post exchange to purchase other needed items. They also contact the Red Cross or finance office if patients need money, and arrange patients’ transportation home following their release from the hospital.

Numerous government organizations and commercial enterprises support the DWMMC, providing everything from free accommodations for families to clothing, snacks, even videos, phone cards, cameras and watches, Livingston said.

Land’s End-Europe and Nike help furnish clothing and shoes that are available free of charge to Operation Enduring Freedom patients through DWMMC’s lending closet, Livingston said.

Other organizations that support the DWMMC include the USO, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, Fisher House, Girl Scouts of

America, Kodak and Timex.

“What this program has really provided,” said Livingston, “is a central office to which commanders can call to learn the status of their soldiers.”

And, on a more personal level, through DWMMC, the soldiers who arrive here and are hurting — for any

of a number of reasons — know they’re not alone. Many people are going to help them, no matter the time of night or day, said Rubenstein.

“I’ve forgotten the names of some of the people who offered me help,” said Johnston, “but I haven’t forgotten what help was offered. It’s been very reassuring.”



SPC Zsuzsanna Lee helps LRMC patients who are in temporary need of clothing find what they need in DWMMC’s lending closet.